



Society Women of Five Cities in "Better Mothers" League; Younger Set Must Give Up Late Dances and Dinners

Leaders of the "Better Mothers" Movement

"Let's Keep the Children Children," Is Their Plea

By Arnold D. Prince

ONE of the most interesting experiments ever undertaken in the United States by women of the highest social prominence is that in which the "better mothers" of Philadelphia have just enrolled.

Society frequently has been accused of setting the pace in extravagance and elaborate entertainments, but in this instance it is society that is taking the lead in checking the tendency toward extremes which was so markedly stimulated in the period immediately after the ending of the war.

In New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, Washington and other big cities of the East women of the wealthiest families are banding together in an effort to simplify amusements, especially so far as they affect the young, the indications being that the work will be carried on by more or less related or affiliated organizations.

An Intercity Union

A very real concern for the future welfare of the growing generation is the outstanding purpose of this movement, but the unique feature of it is this—that the campaign, if carried to its logical conclusion, will mean the establishment of what might be called an intercity "union" in which the leaders of the fashionable world will be the members.

In New York City the basic idea of the work suggested was incorporated several years ago in the Parents' League, of which Mrs. John Henry Hammond is the president. Mrs. Hammond is the daughter of Mrs. William Douglas Sloane, sister of the late Cornelius Vanderbilt. The league was organized in 1914, with Henry P. Davison, of J. P. Morgan & Co., as treasurer. Mrs. Adrian Lambert is one of the active workers.

Not a Reform

Although in no sense a "reform" organization, its mission is to exercise a measure of uniform and organized control over what may be called the "juvenile aristocracy," by limiting them to sane and harmless entertainments, and it is this idea that the Philadelphia mothers, and the mothers of other cities as well, have seized upon now that they recognize the dangers to the growing generation that have come with the ending of the war.

At a recent meeting held in Philadelphia representative women from several cities expressed their views, and the New York organization was asked to submit literature showing how the work had been carried on in this city.

As in New York City, the women forming the new organization in the Quaker City are all members of families ranking at the top in social affairs. Mrs. John S. Newbold, chairman of the executive committee elected to work out preliminary plans, is a leader in the city's most exclusive and conservative circles. The two other members of the committee are Mrs. George Stuart Patterson, cousin of Ava Willing Astor, formerly wife of John Jacob Astor, and Mrs. John Hampton Barnes, who before her marriage was Eleanor Bidle, of the well known family of that name.

The Organizers

Mrs. Charlton Yarnall, at whose home the nucleus of the new association was formed, is a leader in the most exclusive set in the Pennsylvania city, some of the others actively supporting the "union" being Mrs. George McFadden, formerly Miss Josephine B. McIlvaine; Mrs. Paul Denckla Mills, Mrs. Benjamin Franklin Pepper, whose maiden name was Rebecca T. Willing; Mrs. George Mason Chichester,



MRS. HENRY P. DAVISON, of New York, above, and Mrs. George Stuart Patterson, of Philadelphia

Mrs. Charles Stewart Wurts and many members of the Colonial Dames and the Fortnightly Club.

Too Many Parties

"We feel there should be a reduction in the number of late parties for children," said Mrs. Newbold. "The ending of the war brought with it a certain amount of new freedom in the conduct of young people which, perhaps, is not good for them. I think that most of us have, in one way or another, been affected by the same influences. We will try to provide more rational and simple amusements, and perhaps also supervise the kind of plays children will be permitted to see at the theaters."

Mrs. Newbold did not go into details of the situation calling for the organization of the mothers, but Mrs. McFadden contributed an illuminating touch when in addressing a meeting of the women she said that she had been told by the head of one of the fashionable private schools that "it took some of the pupils a week to get over the effects of some of the week-end parties."

Dresses Too Elaborate

This, of course, referred to young misses of very tender age and not debutantes, who are permitted a little more freedom in their recreations.

A still deeper insight into conditions in Philadelphia, against which the mothers are fighting, was provided by Mrs. Joseph Woolston, one of the governors of the Fortnightly Club, who asserted that not only had the simple parties of the growing generation of other days developed into formal affairs lasting until very late hours indeed, but that there had been a striking increase of elaborate dressing among these little folk which was out of all proportion to their age.

"The better mothers are anxious

to take a stand," she said, adding significantly: "Those who won't cooperate will have to be excluded," meaning that a social war would be declared against such parents as did not recognize the wisdom of calling a halt in this form of extravagance.

In Philadelphia, it may be explained, the after effects of the war on social affairs have been pretty much the same as in other big cities, with this exception: Philadelphia, perhaps more than many others, is distinctively a "community of homes," where the social aspects of life are emphasized beyond the point reached in some other places. Therefore, whatever effect this ending of the war had in stimulating extravagance and elaborate forms of entertainment seemed to be multiplied by the many social functions continually going on in the Quaker City.

Predicts Social War

Lacking the many theaters and other opportunities for recreation which are to be had in such abundance in New York City, the desire for diversion in the Pennsylvania metropolis finds its outlet in balls, dinners, dances and "parties" of various kinds, all of which, it is universally admitted, became especially numerous and elaborate with the signing of the armistice.

Philadelphia being the seat of ancient aristocracy which refuses to take second place to any other in the country, these functions not only increased in number among the "grown-ups," but had a corresponding tendency among the juveniles as well.

Whereas in New York City, for example, three or four big dances for "sub-debs" make up a fairly full year, in Philadelphia such gatherings are almost a commonplace, and few weeks go by in a season, even in normal times, when one or more affairs of this kind are not going on either at one of the big hotels or at the homes of the members of the fashionable set.

But with the ending of the war

MRS. ROBERT L. MONTGOMERY, of Philadelphia, one of the initiators of the movement in the Quaker City

came the new influences which had an effect on the young as well as the old. Not only did some of the entertainments for the young folks last until hours when, in the "good old days," children were safely and comfortably in their beds, but in other respects there came a remarkable reflection of the new spirit of the times.

Elaborate Gowns

Young women still in their teens frequently wore dresses which in many respects compared favorably with the elaborate creations favored by the most fashionable mothers. There is no truth in the charge maliciously circulated by "outsiders" that "jazzing" was permitted among these little people, or that the aping of mature styles reached the point of wearing "backless" and "sleeveless" gowns, but there seems to be some basis of justification for the report that "cheek to cheek" dancing was sometimes more or less surreptitiously indulged in.

One extraordinary rumor had it that one of the dancing parties for "sub-debs" was preceded by an "eighteen course dinner," but this also, it would appear, was an idle piece of gossip indulged in by people who sought to give an exaggerated notion of the sort of things that were going on among the very rich. Supper dances for the young folks reached very elaborate levels indeed and cost almost as many thousands in some instances as those given by their elders, but not to the extent of proving eighteen course dinners, which would tax the gastronomic powers of even the most experienced diners.

But this much is true: Philadelphia being, as already stated, a city of many social functions, the rivalries inevitably attendant upon such conditions were greatly stimulated by the general reaction from the war and new forces were set to work against which such conservative women as have enrolled in the new organization were able to make little progress.

Boys Own Cars

It was, and is, by no means unusual for young men sixteen and seventeen years of age to own their own automobiles and sometimes

these set a very lively pace which other young men, and women, too, naturally sought to emulate.

"We don't want to sit in the lemon row," was the way these young people put it when those of the elders who saw the dangers of the new order sought to remonstrate with them.

On top of this, the social atmosphere, to which the sub-deb classes are subject as well as their elders, became increasingly thick with stories of extraordinary extravagance indulged in by some of the most advanced elders, all of which tended more and more to disturb the conservative and well ordered régime observed by Philadelphia's oldest families.

One of these extravagant entertainments, about which the gossips are still buzzing, was given at the sumptuous suburban home of one of the wealthiest of Philadelphia families, whose name is known from one end of the country to the other.

Dinners of Many Courses

Beginning at 8 o'clock in the evening with a dinner which went through as many courses as human ingenuity and unlimited means could provide, the guests danced until 8 o'clock in the morning, when all put on bathing suits and took a refreshing plunge in the big swimming pool which is one of the features of the house. Then the formal evening dresses were again put on, supper was served and dancing was resumed until 9 o'clock in the morning, when breakfast was served and the merrymakers called it a day.

Recently the young daughter of this household, who was present at the party, attracted wide attention by eloping with a young man who had won her hand after a romantic courtship.

Other stories of other elaborate affairs indulged in by the most modern set could be told, but they would have no immediate bearing on the problem with which the "better mothers" are now confronted. The only motive in referring to those already mentioned is to indicate the indirect influence they might have had in stimulating increased freedom among the young folks and as giving an idea of the general fevered atmosphere against which the conservative women of

MRS. HARRY PAYNE WHITNEY, of New York, above, and Mrs. Charlton Yarnall, of Philadelphia

the best families of the city are fighting.

Not Reformers

The women of Philadelphia, it should be explained, have not undertaken anything that might be called a "reform" campaign and are not "uplifters" in any sense, but they are intensely concerned with conserving the simplicity of childhood life, without in any sense leading their children to believe that they are being "disciplined" or "corrected" for past frivolity or misconduct.

However, absolute frankness and candor necessitate the admission that many of the affairs given for the sub-debs and masculine undergraduates in the last few months have outrivaled anything of the kind witnessed in the past and that a definite program of curtailment is contemplated by the conservative mothers.

In Philadelphia affairs attended by young people, especially when held at one of the big hotels, are, of course, closely watched by chaperones selected from among the society women themselves, but some of the features are beyond the power of these patronesses to control—two of these being the very important ones of elaborateness and expense.

A Sample Menu

Thus some of these children's parties have cost thousands, and while there was never anything like an "eighteen course dinner" as a prelude to the dancing, the meals were strikingly intricate if the simple feasts of croquettes, salad, ice cream and cakes are recalled. Here is a menu which may be considered a "fair example" of the kind of food provided for these youngsters at one of the most popular big hotels:

Grape Fruit
Cape May Salt Oysters
Salted Almonds, Olives, Celery
Consomme Prestigious Royale
Velouté Crustacean
Roast Guinea, Currant Jelly
Sweet Potatoes, Southern Style. Green Peas
Hearts of Lettuce
Cheese Patties
Bomba a la James (made of strawberry and vanilla ice cream)
Assorted Cakes
Coffee

Of course, feasts such as this were only provided for young women and young men up to fifteen and sixteen years of age, but quite elaborate repasts were also frequently pre-

pared for the dancing parties in which children from six to ten and twelve years old participated.

Cost \$5,000

The average cost for such menus as shown above is about \$4 a plate, a considerable item in itself when it is remembered that from 200 to 500 children frequently attended the more pretentious affairs. In addition, of course, there was the cost of the ballroom, averaging about \$350 for the evening, of the orchestra and the special frocks to be considered, all of which contributed to raise the total expense for the evening to \$5,000 or more for one evening's recreation.

When the conviction finally came to the "better mothers" that something to check this sort of thing would have to be done, meetings to discuss the situation were held, one of the first organizations to take a definite step being the Colonial Dames of the city. Bishop Rhineland, of Philadelphia, added his protest against the late parties and expensive recreations provided for the young, and, finally, another meeting, at which the groundwork of a working organization was laid, was held at the home of Mrs. Yarnall.

There a general discussion of conditions resulted, and the committee of which Mrs. Newbold is the chairman was elected.

The Parents' League

Mrs. Newbold was not ready recently to discuss the program of simplification that is to be presented, but generally speaking the plan of the Parents' League of New York City probably will be adopted. This, in effect, is:

1. That boys and girls of school age refuse all invitations to parties, theaters, etc., during the school term, except, occasionally, on Fridays and Saturdays, and that parties and theatergoing be limited during the holidays.

2. That parents arrange simple and appropriate forms of recreation for the children; for instance, attendance at young people's concerts, visits to the country, museums and other places of interest, and that they reserve time during the holidays to join their children during such recreations.

3. That parents advocate reasonable hours for beginning and ending dances for young people, that they state them in all invitations and that

Philadelphia and New York Leaders in Movement

they carefully supervise the manner of dancing.

4. That a theater committee send bulletins at regular intervals to all the active members of the mothers' organization, suggesting the most suitable plays for young people. That parents in sending invitations to the theater state the name of the play.

5. That parents confer frequently with the teachers of their children regarding questions affecting their education and general welfare, and that they cooperate with the teachers in upholding the rules and standards of the school.

6. That articles bearing on vital questions relating to the upbringing and education of children be circulated among the active members of the organization and that the members hold informal meetings for the discussion of these questions.

7. That cooperation be sought of such organizations as the alumnae associations of the schools in order that the sons and daughters may work in sympathy with their parents toward a common end.

Heads of the big private schools have announced their willingness to help carry out this program, their general attitude toward the whole problem being stated as something like this:

Schools to Help

"There is no escaping the self-evident truth that indiscriminate theatergoing and the dissipation involved in late hours at dancing and other parties in excessive social activity are an evil. We are anxious to help and to secure help from those who fully recognize this truth and are trying conscientiously to meet this responsibility and who are struggling against certain influences of modern life which surround their boys and girls."

Several of the heads of these private schools were interviewed by the women in Philadelphia enrolled in the new organization, and all agreed that the late parties were having an injurious effect on the children.

"In New York City," said Mrs. Lambert, in discussing the general situation, "the work of the league has met with considerable success. Late parties for the young people are discouraged by general agreement by the members of the league, who now number about 2,000.

"Lists of the plays suitable for children are provided, and so far as possible recreations are restricted to those which will not have an injurious effect on their morals or health."

No Ban on Fun

In conclusion, emphasis should be laid on the fact that in Philadelphia, as in New York, there is no desire on the part of the "better mothers" to give rise to the feeling among the children that they are being "reformed" or that anything at all is being attempted that will have an adverse effect on their self-respect.

As Mrs. Hammond explained some time ago, all that is sought is to endeavor to create a "body of public opinion in favor of common sense and against extremes, especially in amusements," without in any way lessening the pleasure which the young naturally demand and have a right to.

Mothers Not Dodging

"It has been suggested," Mrs. Hammond said on that occasion, "that this apparently was a plan of socially busy women by means of which they hoped to delegate the duty of managing their children to an organization, but nothing could be further from the intent or practice of the league.

"Indeed, it is an organization planned especially to make us all measurably wiser and give us a greater capacity for and understanding of the work devolving upon us in our families and in the social body.

"While each mother and each father is certainly confronted in the personality of each child with a problem nowhere duplicated, the fact remains that much may be derived from counsel and concerted action which no individual could work out alone."

It is in this spirit that the women of Philadelphia have decided to form their organization, and it is to this general plan, outlined by Mrs. Hammond, and the bylaws of the Parents' League that they have dedicated themselves.